

The oldest egg in the Natural History Museum

by N. J. Collar

Green & Scharlemann (2003) refer to the oldest dated egg in the Natural History Museum, Tring, U.K., as that of a Great Bustard *Otis tarda* from 1801, and cite me as the authority for this information. Their original typescript had indicated that the oldest dated egg was that of a Northern Gannet *Sula bassana* from 1807, for which they cited Walters (1993), but as their editor I pointed out to them that the bustard egg was older, and I readily altered the text when they expressed the wish to include this information. Unfortunately I confused the difference between the oldest egg and the oldest *dated* egg. The oldest *dated* egg is indeed the gannet's. The Great Bustard egg in question is merely inscribed "Wilts" and, because there is no date later than 1801 for a Wiltshire bustard clutch in the exhaustive treatment of the species by Smith (1887; see p.353), I have always deemed it reasonable to think that this egg was taken in that year or possibly earlier. However, its date remains a matter of probability rather than inscription, and the statement in Green & Scharlemann (2003) is therefore simply untrue. I apologise to the authors for misleading them, and especially to Michael Walters, whose courteous inquiry drew this matter to my attention, and whose many distinguished years of service in the egg collection at the Natural History Museum I managed to slight by this mistake.

Green, R. E. & Scharlemann, J. P. W. 2003. Egg and skin collections as a resource for long-term ecological studies. *Bull. Brit. Orn. Cl.* 123A: 165-176.

Smith, A. C. 1887. *The birds of Wiltshire*. London: R.H.Porter, London, and H.F.Bull, Devises.

Walters, M. 1993. Uses of egg collections: display, research, identification, the historical aspect. *J. Biol. Curation* 1: 29-35.

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